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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000105

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/07/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#) [VT](#) [VTPREL](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING OAS SYG GAVIRIAS' MISSION: VATICAN
SEEKS TO AVOID POLARIZATION AND VIOLENCE

REF: A) 02STATE 268741 B) 02VATICAN 5607

CLASSIFIED BY: POLOFF GEORGE FROWICK, REASON EO 12958 1.5 B,D

11. (C) SUMMARY: VATICAN COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR CARIBBEAN STATES MONS. GIORGIO LINGUA TOLD POLOFF JANUARY 7 THAT THE HOLY SEE'S MAIN CONCERN IN VENEZUELA IS TO SEE TENSIONS REDUCED AND THE PARTIES WORKING TOWARDS AN AUGUST 2003 REFERENDUM, AS PERMITTED BY THE VENEZUELAN CONSTITUTION. THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE'S DECEMBER 2002 STATEMENT
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SUGGESTS THAT THE CHURCH IN VENEZUELA, AFTER THE SHOOTINGS ON PLAYA FRANCIA DE ALTAMYRA, IS PULLING BACK ITS PREVIOUS STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION IN ORDER TO HELP AVOID A VIOLENT DENOUEMENT. THE HOLY SEE IS OPEN TO A "FRIENDS OF VENEZUELA" PROCESS ONLY IF IT IS MADE A PART OF GAVIRIAS' BRIEF (ASSUMING THAT LULA DA SILVA WOULD HAVE A MODERATING EFFECT ON CHAVEZ). LINGUA WAS UNSURE WHETHER THE HOLY SEE WOULD URGE THE PARTIES TO ASK GAVIRIAS TO TABLE A CONCRETE PROPOSAL. WHILE THE HOLY SEE APPEARS TO BE IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH BOTH THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS AND ITS NUNCIO, ITS ABILITY TO EXERCISE CONTROL OVER THEIR POSITIONS IS LIMITED. EMBASSY CARACAS MAY WISH TO WORK WITH PAPAL NUNCIO DUPUY IN ADVANCE OF HIS ANNUAL GREETING TO PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AS DEAN OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, TO MAKE SURE HE IS ON MESSAGE. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) POLOFF SHARED REF A POINTS ON THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS JANUARY 8 WITH VATICAN CARIBBEAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR MONS. GIORGIO LINGUA. LINGUA SAID THE HOLY SEE'S WAS VERY CONCERNED AT THE INCREASE IN CIVIL STRIFE SINCE WE LAST SPOKE (REF B). HE INDICATED THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE'S DECEMBER 2002 STATEMENT SHOWED THAT THE CHURCH, AFTER THE SHOOTINGS ON PLAYA FRANCIA DE ALTAMYRA, WAS BACKING AWAY FROM ITS PREVIOUS STRONG AND OPEN SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION. LANGUAGE IN THAT STATEMENT WHICH HIGHLIGHTED THE CONTINUED SUFFERING OF VENEZUELA'S POOREST, HOWEVER, WAS NOT AN ATTEMPT TO BUILD BRIDGES TO CHAVEZ. RATHER, ACCORDING TO LINGUA, IT INDICATED THE BISHOPS WERE TRYING TO ATTRACT CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS AWAY FROM THE PRESIDENT. INDEED THE STATEMENT CALLED ON MEDIA, THE GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES TO AVOID INFLAMING THE SITUATION. IT EXHORTED THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE HUMAN RIGHTS AND ESCHEW "STANDING ON LEGALISMS AND
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POLITICAL STRATEGIES" THAT THREATEN THE SOCIAL FABRIC. THE HOLY SEE REMAINS FEARFUL THAT, IN THE BISHOPS' WORDS, A VIOLENT "SOCIAL FRACTURE" REMAINS A GREATER POSSIBILITY TODAY THAN IT WAS BEFORE THE GENERAL STRIKE. YET THE HOLY SEE HAS NO PLANS AT THIS TIME ACTIVELY TO ENGAGE IN THE DIALOGUE. LINGUA REITERATED HIS MESSAGE FROM REF B, THAT THE HOLY SEE HOPED ALL PARTIES WOULD CALM DOWN AND ORGANIZE POLITICALLY TO CONTEST A REFERENDUM ON THE CHAVEZ PRESIDENCY IN AUGUST OF THIS YEAR, AS IS PERMITTED IN THE VENEZUELAN CONSTITUTION. LINGUA OPINED THAT CHAVEZ WAS LOSING SUPPORT AS THE STRIKE PROCEEDED (EVEN AS THE STRIKE APPEARED TO BE WINDING DOWN), AND THAT OVER THE TIME BETWEEN NOW AND AUGUST THE OPPOSITION'S ABILITY TO CARRY THE REFERENDUM WOULD GROW.

13. (C) LINGUA SAID THE VATICAN WAS OPEN TO A "FRIENDS OF VENEZUELA" PROCESS ONLY IF IT WAS MADE A PART OF GAVIRIAS' BRIEF, BUT WOULD NOT WISH TO SEE A FRIENDS GROUP IF IT COMPETED (AND THUS DISTRACTED) FROM THE OAS ENVOY'S WORK. HE BELIEVED THAT BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT LULA DA SILVA MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXERCISE A MODERATING INFLUENCE ON CHAVEZ. LINGUA WAS UNSURE WHETHER THE HOLY SEE WOULD ISSUE A PUBLIC CALL TO SUPPORT GAVIRIAS' WORK. HE WAS ALSO NONCOMMITTAL ABOUT HOLY SEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE PLAN TO HAVE GAVIRIAS TABLE A CONCRETE PLAN AROUND WHICH THE PARTIES COULD BEGIN DIALOGUE.

14. (SBU) ASKED WHETHER PAPAL NUNCIO DUPUY WOULD GREET PRESIDENT CHAVEZ AGAIN THIS YEAR AS DEAN OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, LINGUA SAID HE HADN'T YET HEARD. HE SPECULATED THAT THE ANNUAL MEETING MIGHT BE POSTPONED THIS YEAR, GIVEN THE SITUATION ON THE STREETS. LINGUA WRYLY NOTED THAT IF THE NUNCIO TRULY SPOKE HIS MIND AGAIN HE MIGHT BE PNG'D. (NOTE:
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SOME MAY RECALL THAT DUPUY'S URGING OF CHAVEZ IN REMARKS LAST JANUARY TO MAKE SPACE FOR THE OPPOSITION'S DEMANDS PROMPTED FROM THE LATTER A VITUPERATIVE ATTACK ON THE CHURCH AS A "PARASITE ON VENEZUELAN SOCIETY.") LINGUA TOLD US THAT

NUNCIOS USUALLY DRAFT THEIR ANNUAL REMARKS WITHOUT CLEARING THEM WITH THE HOLY SEE, AND THAT THEY WOULD GENERALLY AIM FOR REMARKS THAT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AS OPPOSED TO THOSE OF THE HOLY SEE.

15. (C) COMMENT: THE HOLY SEE IS FEARFUL THAT IF IT WERE TO ENGAGE MORE ACTIVELY IN BRINGING THE VENEZUELAN PARTIES TOGETHER, ITS OWN POOR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHAVEZ ADMINISTRATION, EXEMPLIFIED IN CHAVEZ' REACTION TO THE NUNCIO'S JANUARY 2002 COMMENTS, WOULD BE MADE EVEN WORSE. THIS COULD HAVE UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE CLERGY AND FAITHFUL WHO SUPPORT THE OPPOSITION. LINGUA'S REACTIONS SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT THE HOLY SEE IS NOT FULLY IN CONTROL OF THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS, NOR OF ITS OWN NUNCIO. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED TO HEAR FROM EMBASSY CARACAS WHETHER THEY ARE CONSULTING WITH DUPUY ON HIS REMARKS, IF ANY, AT THIS YEAR'S

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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	DS-00	EUR-00
	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	OIC-02	ACE-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	NFAT-00
	SAS-00	/006W					

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INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, THOSE REMARKS COULD OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE THE HOLY SEE ALONG THE LINES OF REF A INSTRUCTION. EMBASSY VATICAN IS PREPARED TO PRESS HARDER, AND AT A HIGHER LEVEL, IF WASHINGTON AND CARACAS BELIEVE HOLY SEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE VENEZUELAN CONFLICT WOULD BE USEFUL.
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